

This paper presents the different images of Ancient Persia in Plutarch's works, corresponding to two cultural trends in the period of the Second Sophistic: one grouping it with contemporary Parthia, the other treating it as standing in for the Roman Empire.

The interest second century AD Greek authors had in Parthia was intensified in the wake of Roman concern with the Eastern power, culminating in the campaigns of Trajan (114-117 AD) and Verus (162-166 AD). Among the works inspired by these political developments were Arrian's *Parthica* (*FGrH* 156 F 30-53) and the anonymous treatise on Verus' expedition (*FGrH* 203). A feature of this trend was to fuse the attention given to the Persia of old, stemming from the nostalgia for the Greek heroic past, with the appeal of the contemporary Eastern Empire. One result of this blending was to depict Arsacid Parthia through *motifs* and themes used to describe the Achaemenid kingdom, i.e., as a decadent oriental court, filled with murderous intrigues and cruel and savage behaviour (cf. Plutarch's *Crassus*). Another result was to allude to the relevance of ancient Persia to the present Roman-Parthian rivalry, evidenced, for instance, by the fascination with Alexander's campaign (e.g., Arrian), the attraction of anecdotes from the Great King's court (e.g., Polyaeus, also planning to write on Parthian wars: *Strat.* 8. praef.), and the reference to Xenophon's march (e.g., Lucian, *Quom. hist. conscrib.*, dealing with historians of the Parthian wars, also cites *Anabasis* 1.1.1 at 24). Plutarch himself implicitly compares the struggle of Rome and Parthia with the clash of Greeks and Persians (e.g., *Ant.* 45.12).

Another trend discernible at this very period referred to Roman imperial institutions in terms used by classical authors to portray the Persian system, such as 'satraps' or 'Great King'. In particular, it might be said that from the Hellenic point of view, Greece's submission to the conditions of the King's Peace (387/6 BCE) was analogous to its position under the sway of Rome, with Persia symbolizing the Roman Empire. Evidence of this association prominent in the minds of Greeks may be detected in Plutarch's advice directed at local statesmen to beware of the power of Rome and refrain from inciting the masses to imitate the deeds of their victorious ancestors against Persia (*Praec. ger. reip.* 814a ff.). The dedication of the *Regum et Imperatorum Apophthegmata* attributed to Plutarch, where Trajan is explicitly compared to Artaxerxes, also shows this connection.

This paper shows the manner in which Plutarch hints at both Parthian and Roman connotations by using the Achaemenid Kingdom and creating an interesting interplay of images and associations. This inconsistent depiction is connected with two ethnological schemes detectable in Plutarch and other Second Sophistic authors: either classifying Greeks and Romans as affiliated, advanced nations, standing in opposition to the barbarian Parthians and Persians, or drawing a mutually exclusive antithesis between Greeks and all "others". From this Hellenocentric perspective, Rome is viewed as a foreign power, much like the Persian Empire. Ultimately, it might be said that Plutarch's picture of the decline and fall of Persia insinuates his attitude towards the two contemporary empires: on the one hand, a belief in the imminent downfall of the Parthian Empire and on the other, a forewarning to his Roman readers of a possible dire course of events in the west.